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Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 OSLO 2963

USEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EFIS, PBOR, PFOR, UR, NO
SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN-SOVIET FISHING BARENTS SEA FISHING AGREEMENT

SUMMARY. DRUING THE PAST WEEK THERE HAVE BEEN DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTS IN NORWAY'S LONG-STANDING NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION OVER FISHERY RIGHTS IN THE AREA CLAIMED BY BOTH COUNTRIES IN THE BARENTS SEA. NORWAY'S LAW OF THE SEA MINISTER INITIALED AD REFERENDUM AN AGREEMENT ON THE SUBJECT WITH THE SOVIET FISHERIES MINISTER IN MOSCOW JUNE 16. THIS ACT HAS COME UNDER HEAVY CRITICISM IN NORWAY, BOTH FOR THE TACTICS EVENSEN USED IN ARRIVING AT THE ACCORD AND FOR THE ALLEGED SUBSTANCE OF THE AGREEMENT. THE ISSUE MAY BECOME A MAJOR ELECTION ISSUE IN NORWAY'S OTHERWISE QUIET ELECTIO
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CAMPAIGN AND COULD HAVE SERIOUS RAMIFICATIONS FOR NORWAY'S RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. END SUMMARY.

1. NORWAY'S LONG-STANDING DISAGREEMENT WITH THE SOVIET UNION OVER FISHERIES RIGHTS IN THE BARENTS SEA HAS ENTERED A NEW AND DELICATE PHASE DURING THE PAST WEEK. THE ISSUE HAS BEEN UNDER

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NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES FOR OVER A YEAR AND CONCERNS THE REGULATION OF FISHING IN THE SO-CALLED "GRAY ZONE" WHICH LIES BETWEEN THE BOUNDARY LINES CLAIMED BY EACH COUNTRY IN THE BARENTS SEA. FACING ELECTIONS IN SEPTEMBER, THE LABOR GOVERNMENT HAS PRESSED FOR AN EARLY TEMPORARY AGREEMENT IN THE ISSUE BECAUSE OF ITS IMPORTANCE TO NORWAY'S NORTHERN FISHERMEN, AN IMPORTANT TRADITIONAL LABOR PARTY CONSTITUENCY WITHOUT WHOSE SUPPORT THE LABOR PARTY COULD LOSE THE ELECTION.

2. THE GON'S LOS MINISTER, JENS EVENSEN, TRAVELED TO MOSCOW JUNE 13-16 TO NEGOTIATE THE ISSUE ONCE AGAIN WITH SOVIET FISHERIES MINISTER ISHKOV. ON JUNE 15, THE NORWEGIAN PRESS ANNOUNCED THAT EVENSEN WAS RECOMMENDING THAT HIS GOVERNMENT ACCEPT AN UNSPECIFIED SOVIET PROPOSAL GOVERNING FISHING IN THE "GRAY ZONE." ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, EVENSEN RECOGNIZED HE COULD NOT ACCEPT THE SOVIET PROPOSAL WITHOUT EXCEEDING HIS INSTRUCTIONS AND SO HE SENT HIS UNDER SECRETARY TO OSLO JUNE 16 TO SEEK URGENT CABINET-LEVEL APPROVAL OF THE AGREEMENT.

3. WHEN THE CABINET CONVENED JUNE 16 IN OSLO TO HEAR FROM EVENSEN'S DEPUTY ABOUT THE PROPOSAL, ONLY NINE OF THE FIFTEEN CABINET MEMBERS WERE PRESENT. THE PRIME MINISTER, THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND THE DEFENSE MINISTER AWAY ON TRIPS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THE CABINET CONCLUDED THAT THE ISSUE WAS OF SUFFICIENT POLITICAL IMPORTANCE THAT NO DECISION SHOULD BE MADE THE 16TH, DESPITE EVENSEN'S INSISTENCE ON AN IMMEDIATE DECISION. ACCORDING TO ONE MFA CONFIDENTIAL

SOURCE, EVENSEN WAS GIVEN AUTHORITY TO INITIAL THE AGREEMENT AD REFERENDUM WHICH HE DID JUNE 16 ALTHOUGH THIS FACT HAS NOT BEEN MADE PUBLIC. EVENSEN THEN STATED PUBLICLY TO THE NORWEGIAN PRESS IN MOSCOW THAT IN HIS VIEW THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ACCEPT THE SOVIET PROPOSAL SINCE IT WAS THE BEST THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT COULD GET FROM THE SOVIETS AT THIS TIME.

4. WITH THE PRIME MINISTER BACK IN THE COUNTRY, AND EVENSEN SUMMONED FROM MOSCOW TO PRESENT THE PROPOSAL IN PERSON, THE NORWEGIAN

CABINET RECONVENED ON JUNE 17 TO CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL. THE CABINET REPORTEDLY DECIDED THAT THE AGREEMENT NEEDED FURTHER CONSIDERATION BOTH WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND THEN WITH THE RELEVANT PARLIAMENT COMMITTEES BEFORE THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT COULD TAKE A FINAL DECISION ON WHETHER TO ACCEPT OR REJECT IT. THIS PROCESS IS NOW WXPECTED TO TAKE SEVERAL SEEKS AND THERE ARE EVEN SOME INDICATIONS THAT THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT MAY PREFER TO SUBMIT THE AGREEMENT FOR FORMAL APPROVAL BY THE NEW STORTING AFTER THE ELECTION IN THE FALL. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE JUNE 21, THE PRIME MINISTER STATED THAT IT WAS NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD REJECT THE AGREEMENT.

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5. ALTHOUGH NO DETAILS HAVE BEEN MADE PUBLIC ABOUT THE EVENSEN-
ISHKOV AGREEMENT, THE PRESS HAS REPORTED THAT THE AGREEMENT INVOLVES
AN EXPANSION OF THE "GRAY ZONE" WEST OF THE SOVIET-CLAIMED SECTOR
LINE BOUNDARY AND EAST OF THE NORWEGIAN CLAIMED MEDIAN LINE
BOUNDARY IN THE BARENTS SEA. IT IS GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD THAT
THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES FOR JOINT ADMINISTRATION OF FISHING
IN THIS "GRAY ZONE." AT LEAST ONE NEWSPAPER HAS REPORTED FROM
MOSCOW THAT THE AREA WEST OF THE SECTOR LINE IN THE AGREEMENT
TOTALS SOME 20,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS WHILE THE AREA EAST
OF THE MEDIAN LINE AMOUNTS TO ONLY 4,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS.
(THE TOTAL DISPUTED AREA BETWEEN THE TWO LINES IN ROUGHLY
60,000 SQUARE KILOMETERS.) AN MFA SOURCE, WHILE REFUSING TO
CONFIRM THESE DETAILS, DID CONFIRM THAT THERE IS A SERIOUS
IMBALANCE BETWEEN WHAT THE SOVIETS HAVE GAINED AND WHAT NORWAY
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HAS GOTTEN. MOREOVER, HE NOTED, THE ACCORD DOES NOT INCLUDE
ALL OF THE DISPUTED ZONE THEREFORE LEAVING UNRESOLVED THE ISSUE
OF FISHING IN THAT PART OF THE ZONE NOT COVERED BY THE DRAFT
ACCORD. THE AGREEMENT IS THUS CRITICIZED FOR BEING INEQUITABLE
AND INCOMPLETE.

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6. AN EVEN MORE SERIOUS CONCERN AMONG MFA AND DEFENSE MINISTRY CIRCLES IS THAT EVENSEN'S AGREEMENT, BY "GIVING AWAY" FAR MORE FISHERIES AREA TO THE SOVIETS THAN NORWAY GETS IN RETURN, WILL SERIOUSLY PREJUDICE NORWAY'S LEGAL POSITION IN THE EVENTUAL BOUNDARY NEGOTIATIONS. ONE MFA SOURCE TOLD US THAT THE SECTOR LINE CLAIMED BY THE SOVIETS AS ITS MARITIME BOUNDARY WITH NORWAY VIRTUALLY BISECTS THE EXPANDED GRAY ZONE AS DELIMITED IN THE EVENSEN FISHING AGREEMENT. NORWEGIAN ACCEPTANCE OF AN EXPANDED GRAY ZONE DIVIDED IN HALF BY THE SOVIET SECTOR LINE WOULD, HE FELT, GREATLY PREJUDICE NORWAY'S MEDIAN LINE BOUNDARY CLAIM AND STRENGTHEN THE SOVIET CLAIM.

7. COMMENT: THE EVENSEN-ISHKOV ACCORD PRESENTS NORWAY'S LABOR GOVERNMENT WITH A CONSIDERABLE DILEMMA. IN THE FIRST PLACE, EVENSEN HAS COME UNDER SEVERE CRITICISM IN THE PRESS AND CONFIDENTIAL

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IN POLITICAL CIRCLES IN OSLO FOR THE TACTICS HE USED IN HANDLING THE AGREEMENT. HE IS ACCUSED OF TRYING TO RUSH A DECISION THROUGH THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT WHEN THE KEY POLITICAL FIGURES WERE NOT PRESENT. HE IS CRITICIZED FOR HAVING SENT HIS "MESSENGER" BACK TO OSLO TO DESCRIBE THE AGREEMENT TO THE CABINET RATHER THAN COMING HIMSELF. FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANT, HE IS ACCUSED OF HAVING ACCEPTED ON THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT'S BEHALF AN AGREEMENT WHICH REPORTEDLY DOES NOT ADEQUATELY SAFEGUARD NORWAY'S FISHING AND BOUNDARY INTERESTS. SOME COMMENTATORS NOTE THAT EVENSEN HAS LONG BEEN NOTED FOR HIS FREEWHEELING APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY, AND THAT TO SOME EXTENT THE LABOR GOVERNMENT IS NOW PAYING THE PRICE FOR ALLOWING HIM TO RUN RELATIVELY FREE IN HIS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS.

8. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED IN OSLO THAT THE LABOR GOVERNMENT NEEDS THE VOTES OF NORWAY'S NORTHERN FISHERMEN IF IT IS TO WIN THIS SEPTEMBER'S ELECTION. THE FISHERMEN HAVE BEEN PRESSURING THE GOVERNMENT TO TRY TO PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS VIS-A-VIS NON-NORWEGIAN FISHERMEN, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF THE EC AND THE SOVIET UNION. EVENSEN IN TURN HAS BUILT HIS OWN POLITICAL CAREER AND POWER BASE BY PORTRAYING HIMSELF AS THE PROTECTOR OF THE FISHERMEN'S INTERESTS. BY HAVING HIMSELF TO THE FATE OF THE NORTHERN FISHERMEN AND INDIRECTLY TO THE FATE OF THE NORWEGIAN/SOVIET NEGOTIATIONS ON FISHERIES, EVENSEN HAS MADE HIS POLITICAL CAREER LARVELY DEPENDENT ON THE OUTCOME OF THE TALKS IN MOSCOW. THUS THE PRESS HAS CRITICIZED HIM FOR SACRIFICING NORWAY'S BROADER INTERESTS TO HIS OWN NARROW POLITICAL INTERESTS. EVENESEN CLEARLY

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EXACERBATED THIS PROBLEM BY HIS HIGH-HANDED ATTITUDE TOWARDS
HIS OWN GOVERNMENT AND BY HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS WHICH LIMIT
HIS GOVERNMENT'S NEGOTIATING FLEXIBILITY. ON THE
OTHER HAND, SOME CONTACTS IN THE MFA AGREE WITH EVENSEN'S
VIEW THAT THE ACCORD MAY BE THE BEST DEAL NORWAY COULD WXPECT
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FROM THE SOVIETS NOW. THEY NONETHELESS REGRET HIS HAVING
TIED THE GON'S HANDS BY SAYING SO PUBLICLY.

9. GON ACCEPTANCE OF THE ISHKOV-EVENSEN AGREEMENT MAY BE
ATTRACTIVE TO FISHERMEN IN THE NORTHERN PART OF NORWAY AND
THIS MIGHT LESSEN THE CHANCE OF THE LABOR PARTY'S DEFEAT IN
SEPTEMBER'S ELECTION. AT THE SAME TIME, THE AGREEMENT HAS
ALREADY COME UNDER SEVERE ATTACK FROM THE NON-SOCIALIST PRESS
AND POLITICAL LEADERS, INDICATING THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS
THE AGREEMENT THE NON-SOCIALISTS WILL MAKE AN ELECTION ISSUE
OF THE ACCORD BY PORTRAYING IT AS A "GIVE AWAY." THAT AGRUMENT
COULD COST THE LABOR PARTY MORE VOTES THAN THE AGREEMENT WOULD
WIN FOR THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT
TURNS DOWN THE AGREEMENT, IT COULD LOSE SUPPORT IN THE NORTH
(THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY) AND NORWAY'S RELATIONS WITH THE USSR
ARE CERTAIN TO WORSEN. THOUGH THIS MAY NOT COST THE LABOR
PARTY VOTES IN THE ELECTION, IT COULD MAKE THE TASK OF DEALING
WITH THE SOVIETS AND NORTHERN AND OTHER ISSUES MUCH MORE
DIFFICULT IN THE MONTHS AHEAD.

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10. THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT WILL NOW TAKE ITS TIME IN CONSIDERING THE AGREEMENT, FIRST CHECKING WITHIN THE BUREAU-CRACY AND THEN WITH THE RELEVENT STORTING COMMITTEES. THE AGREEMENT CLEARLY FACES AN UPHILL BATTLE WITHIN THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT. THE OPPOSITION TO THE ACCORD IN THE FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTRIES IS SO STRONG THAT AT LEAST ONE HIGH MOD IFFICLA PREDICTS THE GOVERNMENT WILL REJECT THE ACCORD WITHOUT CONSULTING THE STORTING AT ALL. IF THE GOVERNMENT DOES TAKE THE AGREEMENT TO THE STORTING, IT WILL BE EXAMINED VERY CAREFULLY BY THE NON-SOCIALISTS WITH AN EYE TO ITS POTENTIAL AS AN ELECTION ISSUE. SEVERAL OF OUR SOURCES IN THE NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT DOUBT THAT THE STORTING COMMITTEE WILL ACCEPT THE AGREEMENT AS IT IS CURRENTLY WRITTEN. POSSIBLY, THEN, THE NON-SOCIALISTS WILL SAVE THE LABOR GOVERNMENT FROM HAVING TO DISAVOW
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ONE OF ITS OWN MINISTERS SINCE THE GOVERNMENT COULD BLAME THE REJECTION OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. ALTHOUGH THIS WOULD PRESUMABLE DEFUSE THE ISSUE AS AN ELECTION ISSUE, IT WILL CERTAINLY NOT HELP NORWAY IN ITS LONGER-RANGE DIFFICULTY OF DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS.

11. ONE CLEAR CASUALTY IS EVENSEN. THE GENERAL SENTIMENT IN OSLO IS THAT AFTER HIS CLUMSY STATEMENTS ON THE NORWEGIAN SPY CASE EARLIER THIS YEAR, AND HIS HIGH-HANDED BEHAVIOR IN MOSCOW LAST WEEK, EVENSEN'S POLITICAL FUTURE IS DIM INDEED. MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT THAT HE WILL NOT FEATURE IN THE LABOR GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTION SHOULD LABOR WIN, ESPECIALLY SINCE HE LACKS AN INDEPENDENT POWER BASE OF HIS OWN.
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